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LIFE HISTORY OF THE CALIFORNIA CONDOR PART IV.—THE YOUNG CONDOR IN CAPTIVITY

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WITH SIX PHOTOGRAPHS BY HERMAN T. BOHLMAN

IN the November issue of THE CONDOR for 1906, I gave an account of finding the nest and egg of the California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*). In the issue for January, 1908, I gave some historical data and facts about the range of the bird. In the March, 1908, issue, I related the observations we have collected on the home life of the pair of condors we have studied. In the present paper I shall tell something of the young condor in captivity.

Altho the California Condor in the wild state likely lives quite a long time, the bird in captivity as a rule does not survive many years, nor does it have the brilliancy of color found in the wild specimens. At present I know of but four of these birds in confinement. One, named General, of whom I shall write, is at the New York Zoological Park. During the winter of 1906 I saw four at the National Zoological Park in Washington, but last winter there were but three, as one had died. A few years ago a condor was kept at the Soldiers' Home, at Sawtelle, California, and another at the Zoological Park in Philadelphia, but both of these are now dead. I saw one in 1903 at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, which was brightly colored. I did not know its age at the time, but it died a year or so after that. The New York Zoological Society secured one of these birds March 14, 1905, but it died October 17 of the following year as the result of swallowing a rubber band that had been given it by some visitor.

We had found the condor's nest on March 10, containing one egg. This egg hatched on March 22. We studied and photographed the young condor in his nest at different intervals up to the 6th of July. Then, when about two-thirds grown, he made the journey from his home in the mountains to Portland, Oregon. We gave him good care on the way and he stood the trip very well. On July 10 he arrived in Portland and, for the time being, was given quarters in the back yard. He weighed fifteen pounds. He was fed twice a day with about a pound of raw meat and given plenty of water. Once a day he was given the freedom of the back yard



Fig. 1. THE OLD CONDOR AT HOME IN THE MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. IN COOL WEATHER THE LONG FEATHERS OF THE NECK ARE RUFT UP CLOSELY ABOUT THE HEAD

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when he would flap for exercise, or go jumping across the yard, using his wings to help him along.

When the young condor was at home within the rocky walls of his cave he was very savage. Whenever we went near he lunged about, striking with his bill. Soon after he was taken from his home, his ferocity gave way to fear and then to gentleness. One day when the dog was lying asleep in the yard, the bird walkt up and nabbed him by the ear. At every opportunity he would pounce upon the dog with a flap of his wings, but the dog never remained to fight. One afternoon the bird climbed the back steps where the cat was sitting. Pussy didn't see the condor till



Fig. 2. GENERAL, THE YOUNG CALIFORNIA CONDOR, AT THE AGE OF SIX MONTHS

he reacht the top step and was about to take a bite, when she suddenly awoke with a fit and jumpt backward into space.

In order to study the young condor under favorable conditions and to watch him closely day by day, we took him to our summer camp up the Willamette River. We placed General, as we called him, in an enclosure of about twelve by fifteen feet that we made under the trees. We gave him the stump of an old apple tree to perch on, but the primordial freedom of his race lingered within him, for he did not like the idea of being closed in. We let him out a part of each day so he could get plenty of evercise, take his bath in the creek and warm himself in the sun. If he were not releast at the usual time, he became restless and soon attracted our atten-

tion by climbing up and poking his nose thru at the gate. The minute I opened it he stalkt out, but always stopt cautiously a moment or two outside the gate to look about. He did nothing without deliberation. With several hops he went half way across the yard, flapping his big wings. Then he went thru a regular dance, as if celebrating his freedom. He stretcht his wings and jumpt straight up in the air several times in succession, like an Indian on the war path; but he never said a word.

Contrary to expectation, General was cleanly in habits. He had been fed on clean fresh meat since he was taken from the nest, and soon he would take nothing else. Several times we tried him on stale meat, but he never took it unless compelled by hunger. His preference was undoubtedly for clean fresh beef. If a piece

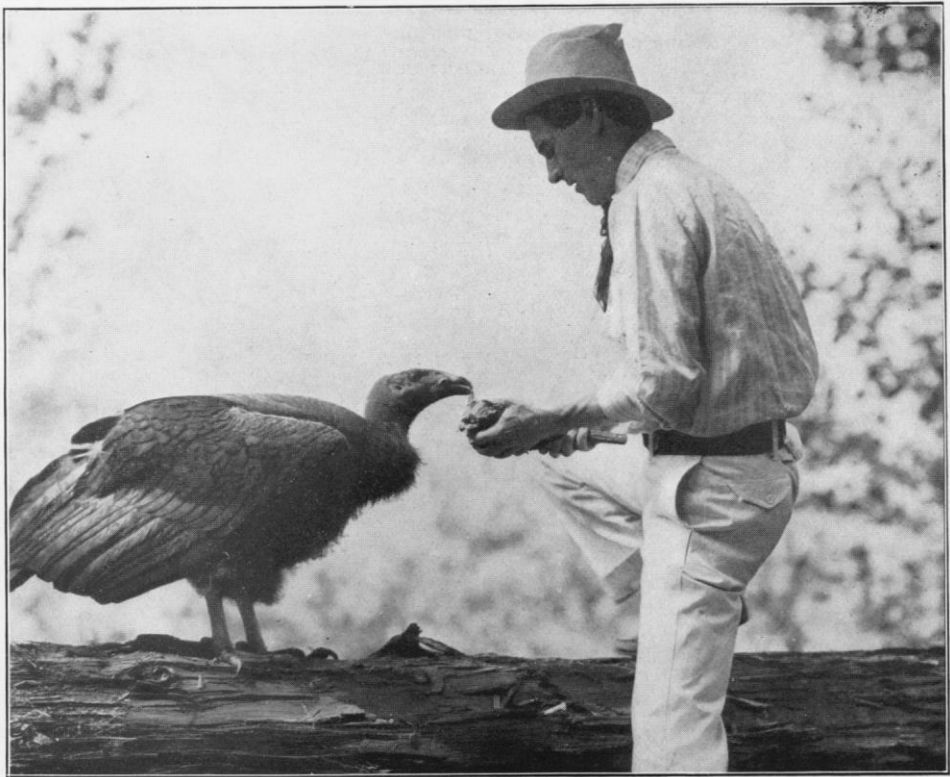


Fig. 3. GENERAL WAS OFTEN FED BY HAND; HE WAS ALWAYS GENTLE WHEN TREATED KINDLY

dropt on the ground or was the least bit dirty, he refused it. Several times we tried him on wild game, such as squirrel and rabbit; but he would not touch it if he could get fresh beef. One time I gave him nothing but wild game for two days and when I got some beef he made a glutton of himself. The instant I went near with the beef, he smelled it and began reaching for my hand. He gulpt down two or three pieces and then I slipt in a bite of squirrel, but he threw it out. I tried mixing the two, but he pickt out all the beef. He was very fond of a good bone, which I often nailed to the perch. He gnawed it with as much eagerness as a dog, till not a bit of meat was left.

Fresh, running water was a luxury to the young condor. He pattered along

in the creek for an hour at a time. He was especially attracted by any small white object, such as a light-colored rock, a bit of broken china, or a piece of paper. He liked to play about the hydraulic ram. When he decided to bathe, he got under the spouting water and wallowed in the pool. He never seemed to feel thoroly washt, for when he was soakt thru, he stept out for a moment and then suddenly decided to go in again. He kept this up till he could hardly walk, or until I drove him out of the water.

General was as playful as a pup. In the morning after I gave him his breakfast he wanted to play. Down he jumpt and pounced upon a stick or a leaf, shook it in his bill, dropt it, just to jump upon it with both feet and toss it up again. He became hilarious the minute he got out of the enclosure; he seemed so much so he could hardly control himself. He was extremely fond of pulling on a rope. We often played with him in this way. He snatcht the rope in his bill and sat back on



Fig. 4. GENERAL SUNNING HIMSELF; HE OFTEN SAT ON HIS PERCH BY THE RIVER WITH WINGS SPREAD FOR TEN OR FIFTEEN MINUTES AT A TIME

his haunches with a jerk that almost sent one sprawling; then, finding that he was making no headway, he jumpt up and down, flapping with considerable strength.

When he was first let out, he generally made straight for one of the tents to grasp a rope and pull back till he threatened to demolish the whole thing. He often amused himself in this way for some time, and he lookt very comical in such antics. When I pulled a rope along the ground, he watcht it like a kitten after a string and ambled along to catch it. When he got tired of romping, he always came up to get his head rubbed and roll about on the ground. He had to be nibbling all the time and liked to tug at my shoe-strings or anything else that he could pull. If one of us was sitting in the sun, he would lie flat on the ground, letting his wings fall loose, and nose about in perfect content.

We set up a perch for General out on the river bank just beyond our camp, and there he loved to sit in the sunshine. He seemed to enjoy watching the buzzards

that almost daily sailed overhead, and the crows that flapt past. The birds that flew above him were always intensely interested. The buzzards sailed around and around, turning their heads to watch, but never seemed to understand why he stayed there. The crows were always greatly alarmed and often percht in the willows and alders nearby to caw in curiosity, while he sat as if in reverry, watching every move they made.

He was always shy when visitors were about unless he could climb up on one of his perches out of reach. Ordinarily he played about the yard, paying no attention to our presence, but the minute he saw a stranger coming, he made all haste to climb one of the perches. He was usually afraid of strange women, which we thought was due to their manner of dress or the brighter colors that they wore. He knew the three members of the family in their camp clothes, and a change of dress

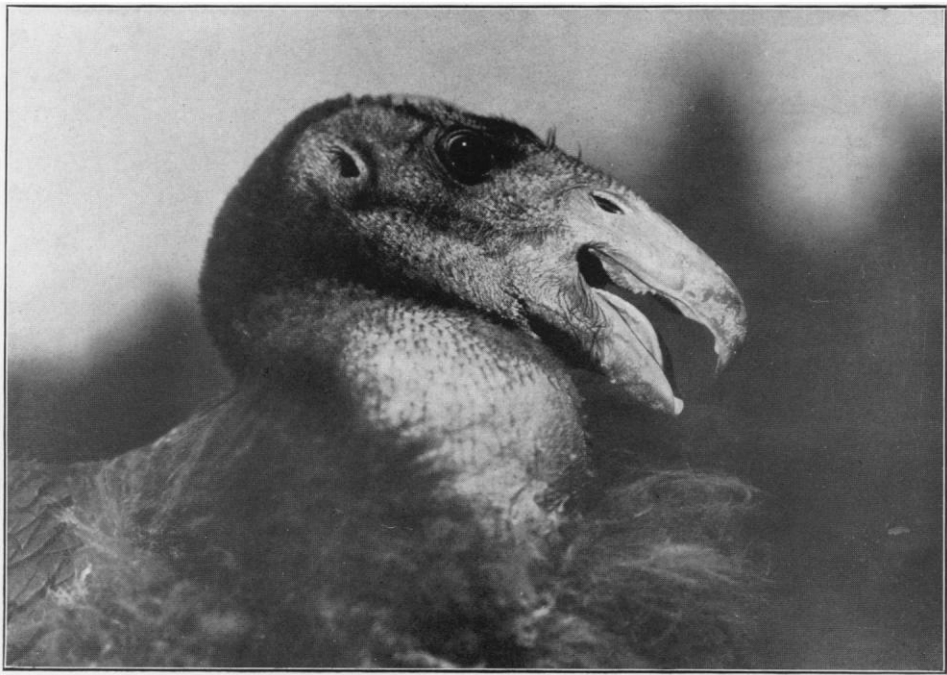


Fig. 5. THE CONDOR SMILE

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always made some change in his attitude.

The camera was a bore to General. Ordinarily I could walk up to him any place about the yard, but when I approacht to take a picture he began to edge away as far as possible. Perhaps he remembered the instrument from his early days when he was hauled out of his nest and when he hist in defiance at being set up before the camera. He was in a savage state then and fought like a demon. It was evident he still retained the hatred of his younger days.

Whenever I took the ax and went across the creek to split wood, General was eager to follow. When he saw me chopping sticks and throwing them in a pile, he showed great interest. He hopt along till he was standing by my side, or he jumpt on one of the blocks and waited till I finisht. If I were sawing wood, he wanted to climb on top of the saw and help. If I returned to camp, he sometimes climbed

one of his perches for a time, but he soon got tired of being alone and came ambling back where we were.

One might think a person could have little attachment for a vulture. There is nothing treacherous or savage in the condor nature. General undoubtedly felt a strong love for society. He liked to be petted and amused. He preferred to be near me rather than alone. His intelligence was surprizing at times. He soon learned to follow me about and come when called. If I walkt over to the apple tree and patted it, he climbed up immediately. His instinct to climb was strong. The minute I set a ladder up against a tree, up he would hop. He liked to climb to the top of a stump and fly off. One of these stumps was ten feet high. He was



Fig. 6. GENERAL WITH WINGS OUTSTRETCHT, SIDE VIEW

just learning the use of his wings and seemed to enjoy the sensation. He flew to the ground only to climb up and try the same experiment. At times he flapt his wings with such energy that he lifted himself into the air. But this was only practice, for he was still timid about trusting his wings.

The old condors had shown great love for each other and for their single nestling. The young condor soon lost his wildness when taken from his native haunts, and he was now gentle and fond of those who cared for him. We had fed him by hand on small bits of raw meat, from the beginning, and he showed an intelligence that was as markt as in any pet we have ever had. He loved to be petted and fondled. He liked to nibble at my hand, run his nose up my sleeve, and bite the

buttons on my coat, and he was gentler than any pet cat or dog. Every move he made was with care as if afraid of being too rough. Of course, if he were scared or struck at, he would strike back. But there was never the least indication of savageness when he was well treated. If I held meat in my hand, he nibbled to get it, but never once did he bite.

A young condor is the incarnation of ugliness to most people. He is known only as a degenerate and a carrion-eater. But there is more than this in the condor nature. He readily adapts himself to better conditions and rises above the position that nature has forced him to occupy. The instinct for cleanliness was strong; he wanted fresh clean meat and fresh running water.

In the condor home far back in the mountains I saw the display of a deeper love and affection than I have ever seen in bird life. In the absence of his own kind, General took human companionship not passively, but he showed that it pleased him. Why should such a creature be revolting? He was not ugly to me. It was not only the outward appearance but the inner nature of the bird that we learned to know. He was not stupid, contrary to some writers. He saw everything. He had a temper and showed anger when there was cause. At other times he was gentle and always ready to be petted. Behind his rough exterior and his appearance of savageness, this young condor showed a nature that was full of love and gentleness.

By the middle of August, General was well fledged except that his breast was still covered with gray down. By another month this was replaced by brown feathers. With wings extended, he measured over eight feet. He weighed twenty and a half pounds and was forty-six inches in length. The wing feathers were strong, but they could not yet support his heavy body, for as yet he could fly but a few yards.

After a continued and close study of over six months, the young condor had grown almost to maturity and we had carried our observations as far as the conditions would allow. On September 29, 1906, General left Portland, Oregon, to take up more commodious quarters in the New York Zoological Park. During the summer he is kept in the flying cage where he has room to fly about and get plenty of exercise. During the winter he has been kept inside as a protection from a climate much colder than that of his native land.

When General first arrived in New York, he was placed in the cage with another California Condor which was then at the Park. The two immediately became fast friends and both seemed to enjoy company. But in less than two weeks after that, the first bird died, so up to the present time General has had no companion of his own kind.

During the month of December, 1906, while I was in New York, I went out to see General and was allowed to enter the cage with him. The minute I got near enough, he began nibbling my buttons and putting his head under my arm.

I did not see the young condor again until December 6, 1908, when I was in New York. I again entered his cage and found him as friendly and affectionate as ever. He nibbled the buttons on my coat and wanted to be petted. I was very much surprised to find that he showed no signs of bright color about his head, as it was covered with short gray down. He had been in good health, but at the age of almost three years he had not acquired the bright coloring of his parents. It is interesting to note that the head of a newly-hatched condor, as well as that of the old bird, is perfectly bald; yet the head of the immature condor for the first few years is covered with a thick coat of furry down.